

HOW TO OBTAIN A SOFA STAMP IN YOUR TOURIST PASSPORT...

by Steve Smith

Many Americans stationed overseas are unfamiliar with the requirements and formalities associated with what is known as a "SOFA stamp." SOFA stands for "Status of Forces Agreement," and a "SOFA stamp" is a stamp that goes in a passport which identifies the bearer as one who is exempt from ordinary visa and customs requirements. SOFA stamps are issued to eligible civilian personnel; they are not issued to service members. It is not uncommon for German passport control agents to demand to see a SOFA stamp when American civilians stationed in Germany attempt to re-enter Germany after traveling abroad.

Eligible American civilians stationed in Germany are only entitled to one SOFA stamp. Civilians who received a red official passport or a blue "no-fee" passport from the military should already have a SOFA stamp stamped on one of the visa pages inside the passport.

However, many Americans have tourist passports they paid for out of their own pocket. If you do not have an official or no-fee passport, and you are the family member of a service member, a civilian employee of the Government, or the dependent family member of a civilian employee of the Government, you are required to have a valid SOFA stamp in your tourist passport.

SOFA stamps for tourist passports are printed on a separate page of blue paper and laminated in plastic. This gives the bearer the option of removing the SOFA stamp from the passport while traveling so they cannot be so easily identified with the military.

DOD civilian employees should contact their servicing CPAC to have AE Form 600-77A completed, certifying that they, and their family members, are eligible for a SOFA stamp. Take the completed AE Form 600-77A to the Military Personnel Division in Room 103 of Building 3245 on Kleber Kaserne (located just down the hill behind the Kaiserslautern Legal Services Center), and they will generate a SOFA stamp for you on the spot during their afternoon customer service hours (see below).

Family members of military personnel do not need AE Form 600-77A. The Military Personnel Division will verify their command-sponsorship on-line before creating a SOFA stamp for them.

Active duty service members do not need a SOFA stamp in their passports. They should, however, carry their military ID card with them when they travel, as this is accepted in lieu of a SOFA stamp when service members go through passport control upon entering Germany.

If you have further questions on SOFA stamp eligibility, requirements, or procedures, contact the Military Personnel Division's Passport Section at DSN 483-8892 or Civilian 0631-411-8892. Their customer service hours for processing SOFA stamps are Monday thru Friday, 1300 to 1530 hours.